

Investigating the Effect of Sexual Satisfaction on Marital Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Cognitive Emotion Regulation

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: Marital satisfaction serves as an indicator of the stability and effectiveness of the marital system and is one of the most critical determinants of a healthy family structure. The present study aims to investigate the effect of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction through the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation.

Methodology: This study is descriptive-correlational research with a cross-sectional design, employing structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population consisted of all couples in Tehran who visited Farhangsara centers for marriage and family counseling between July and October 2023. The sample included 169 men and women selected through multi-stage cluster random sampling. The research instruments included the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Scale, the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS), and the Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ). Data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 and Smart PLS 4 software with the structural equation modeling method, considering a significance level of 0.05.

Findings: The results showed that sexual satisfaction had a significant positive effect on marital satisfaction through the mediating variable of positive refocusing ($\beta=0.282$, $P=0.000$). Conversely, sexual satisfaction had a significant negative effect on marital satisfaction through the mediating variables of catastrophizing ($\beta=-0.117$, $P=0.004$) and rumination ($\beta=-0.146$, $P=0.021$).

Conclusion: The findings of this study indicate the influence of cognitive emotion regulation on marital satisfaction. Furthermore, sexual satisfaction impacts cognitive emotion regulation, which, in turn, affects marital satisfaction through its components.

Keywords: Sexual Satisfaction, Marital Satisfaction, Cognitive Emotion Regulation

1. Introduction

Marital satisfaction is a fundamental aspect of marital quality that reflects the subjective perceptions of couples and plays a crucial role in relationship outcomes. It is also an essential element of well-being for married individuals or those living with a partner (Tartakovsky, 2023). In fact, marital satisfaction encompasses the positive attitudes and

enjoyment that spouses experience regarding various aspects of their relationship, such as communication, personality dynamics, conflict resolution, financial matters, and parenting (Shahriar, Kazemianmoghadam, Khalfi & Mehrabizadeh Honarmand, 2023). It is influenced by the degree of agreement between partners, their satisfaction and commitment to the relationship, expressions of affection, shared interests and activities, and sexual relations (Honarvar,

Rahgozar, Niknejad, Zare & Rezaei et al., 2024). One study noted that the components of marital satisfaction are correlated with sexual satisfaction, suggesting that fostering conditions and providing necessary education to enhance marital satisfaction could lead to increased sexual satisfaction among couples (*Dehghani Champiri & Dehghani, 2023*). Another study indicated a significant positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction, highlighting that sexual satisfaction and psychological well-being are strong predictors of marital satisfaction (*Mohammadfarahmand & Rad, 2023*).

A satisfying sexual relationship is considered a crucial factor in the survival of the family, as it can significantly impact couples. Sexual dissatisfaction often leads to feelings of failure and insecurity, which can ultimately undermine family structure and result in issues such as divorce, social problems, and various associated physical and psychological health challenges (*Naji, Hoseinnezhad, Heshmat & Asgharipour, 2024*). Sexual satisfaction, defined as the emotional response stemming from an individual's subjective evaluation of their sexual relationship with their partner, is a personal need that encompasses both positive and negative aspects in interpersonal relationships. It plays a prominent role in the psychological well-being of couples, influenced by factors such as age, age differences with a spouse, economic status, mood disorders, anxiety, and the duration of the marriage (*Bafrani, Nourizadeh, Hakimi, Mortazavi, Mehrabi & Vahed, 2023*). In fact, sexual satisfaction is an essential component of a couple's health, determining how well sexual partners' expectations are met

emotions, reflecting on them, and dealing with their consequences) (*Fischer, Andersson, Billieux & Vögele, 2022*). It comprises four maladaptive strategies (self-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and other-blame) and five adaptive strategies (acceptance, positive refocusing, refocus on planning, positive reappraisal, and perspective-taking) (*Esmaeili, Khakshoor, Tavakoly & Najafi, 2024*). Research has indicated that cognitive emotion regulation skills are among the most significant individual factors contributing to a successful marriage and family stability (*Salehi, Hoseinian & Yazdi, 2021*). Another study suggested that cognitive emotion regulation improves relationships and marital satisfaction by facilitating emotional understanding between couples and providing opportunities for cognitive processing, including during moments of anger (*Ashori, Zade-Mohammadi, Ramezani, Vafaei & Karimi, 2022*).

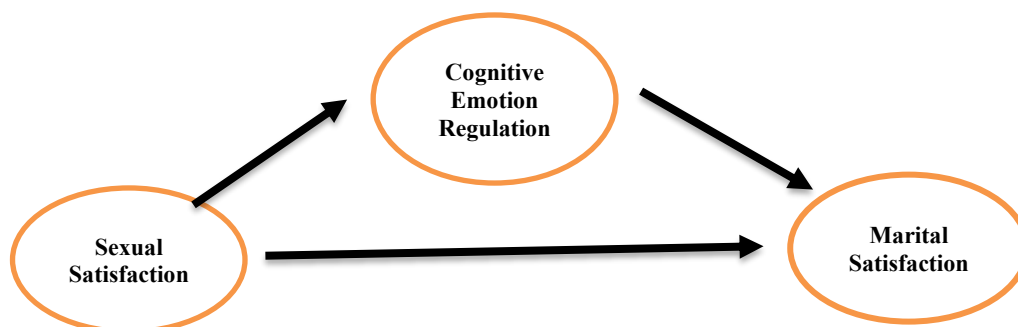
Since marital satisfaction is a fundamental component of well-being, and marital dissatisfaction is a primary contributor to divorce (*Tartakovsky, 2023*), it is essential to investigate the factors that influence marital satisfaction. Despite the significance of this topic, no prior research has simultaneously examined the effect of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction through the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation. Therefore, there is a research gap in this area. The present study is among the first to address this issue, aiming to contribute to the promotion of family psychological well-being and the prevention of marital dissatisfaction. The objective of this research is to answer the following question: What is the impact of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction through the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation?

and how a decline in those expectations may adversely affect both physical and mental well-being (*Firoozi, Kashani & Vaziri, 2023*). Findings from one study indicated that high sexual satisfaction is significantly associated with marital satisfaction (*Arinze & Olawa, 2023*). Another study highlighted that sexual satisfaction plays a critical role in emotional divorce and difficulties in emotional regulation among couples (*Shabankare, Heidari, Makvandi & Marashian, 2021*).

Cognitive emotion regulation is a valuable skill that likely enhances the quality of relationships. The ability to employ emotion regulation strategies, such as mitigating negative emotions, can be beneficial for sexual functioning (*Sævik & Konijnenberg, 2023*). Cognitive emotion regulation refers to the process through which emotions are generated, experienced, and modified. This process encompasses emotional awareness (attending to, differentiating, and labeling emotions), their expression (suppressing versus expressing emotions), and their experience (accessing

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework of the Research



to 40 years, a minimum of one year of marital life, possession of at least a high school diploma, attendance at the counseling centers under investigation, informed consent to participate, and completion of the questionnaires (failure

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study is descriptive-correlational research with a cross-sectional design, and it utilized Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Additionally, given the objective of the research, it is classified as applied research. The statistical population consisted of all couples in Tehran who visited Farhangsara centers for marriage and family counseling between July and October 2023. The sample included 169 men and women selected through a multi-stage cluster random sampling method. The adequacy of the sample size was calculated based on Cohen's formula for determining sample size in SEM, taking into account the number of observed and latent variables in the model, the anticipated effect size, and the desired levels of probability and statistical power (Cohen, 2013). Based on this formula, the following factors were considered to determine the sample size:

Anticipated effect size: 0.3

Desired statistical power level: 0.8

Number of latent variables: 3

Number of observed variables: 100

Probability level: 0.01

Based on the calculations, the researcher determined a sample size of 156 participants. However, to account for potential sample attrition, the researcher increased the target sample size to 250 individuals. In the next step, the research population was determined based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria comprised an age range of 20

to respond to more than 8 items in the questionnaires resulted in exclusion). The exclusion criteria included any physical or mental disorders that could hinder participation, incomplete questionnaires, chronic physical or neurological illnesses, use of psychiatric medications, substance abuse disorder in either partner, participation in recent individual or couples therapy, concurrent extramarital relationships, and lack of willingness to participate in the study. The research procedure was as follows: first, the necessary approvals for conducting the study were obtained from the researcher's university. Subsequently, the researchers visited five Farhangsara centers in Tehran (the names of the centers remain confidential to protect participants' privacy). These Farhangsara centers were selected through the following process: a list of Farhangsara centers in Tehran was obtained online, and the centers were categorized into 22 groups based on Tehran's urban districts. Five districts were then randomly selected using a randomization table, and one center from each selected district was chosen at random. Next, the researcher visited the selected centers and coordinated with their management to conduct the study. Following this, the researcher approached male and female attendees at these centers and randomly invited individuals to participate in the study. For those who agreed to participate, detailed information was provided regarding the study's objectives and procedures. This included an explanation of the study's aims, necessary research permissions, and adherence to ethical principles. Participants were assured that no research forms contained personal information and that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they wished. The questionnaires were

distributed to couples in person, with 50 couples randomly selected from each district to participate, and the completed forms were subsequently collected.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. ENRICH Marital Satisfaction (EMS) Questionnaire

This self-report questionnaire, developed by Olson, Fowers, and Olson in 1993, assesses potential problem areas and identifies positive aspects to enhance marital relationships (Fowers & Olson, 1993). It evaluates various dimensions, including satisfaction with personality traits, marital communication, conflict resolution, financial management, leisure activities, sexual relations, marriage and children, relationships with close relatives, and religious orientation. The original version consists of 115 items covering these dimensions. Due to its length, several shorter versions have been created. Olson initially introduced a 15-item version, followed by a 47-item version. The 47-item ENRICH questionnaire employs a five-point Likert scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, always). The total score ranges from 47 to 235, with higher scores indicating greater marital satisfaction. The creators of the questionnaire reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.71 to 0.86, demonstrating its reliability and divergent validity in distinguishing couples based on marital satisfaction. In Iran, the questionnaire's reliability was reported at 0.95 using Cronbach's alpha (Bakhshayesh & Mortazavi, 2010). In this study, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated to be 0.811 using Cronbach's alpha.

2.2.2. Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS)

The Hudson Index of Sexual Satisfaction was initially developed in 1998 to assess sexual satisfaction among couples and was revised in 2013 (Hudson, 2013). The original version included 25 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) and measured four dimensions: sexual desire, sexual attitude, quality of sexual life, and sexual compatibility. The revised version consists of 17 items rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = always). The minimum and maximum possible scores are 17 and 85, respectively, with higher scores indicating greater sexual satisfaction. In an Iranian study, reliability was calculated as 0.85 using split-half reliability and 0.92 using the Spearman-Brown method (Ghaffariyan Roohparvar et al., 2021). In this study, Cronbach's alpha was employed to measure reliability, yielding a coefficient of 0.884.

2.2.3. Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ)

This self-report questionnaire was developed in 2002 by Garnefski and colleagues to assess individuals' cognitive emotion regulation strategies (Garnefski, Koopman, Kraaij, & ten Cate, 2009). It is a 36-item multidimensional scale scored on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 5 = always). The questionnaire identifies nine cognitive coping strategies that individuals utilize after experiencing negative events or situations. In Iran, the questionnaire has been validated, revealing seven primary factors: self-blame (3 items), other-blame (4 items), rumination (5 items), catastrophizing (4 items), and acceptance (4 items) as negative factors, along with positive refocusing (8 items) and positive reappraisal (4 items) as positive factors (Samani & Sadeghi, 2010). Each factor is calculated separately. An Iranian study reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 for the overall scale (Mizani et al., 2021). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the CERQ subscales were as follows: self-blame = 0.930, other-blame = 0.860, rumination = 0.735, catastrophizing = 0.885, acceptance = 0.894, positive refocusing = 0.782, and positive reappraisal = 0.802.

2.3. Data Analysis

Finally, the data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 and Smart PLS 4 software, employing the structural equation modeling method. Statistical findings were deemed significant at the 0.05 level. The researcher utilized SPSS to assess the descriptive statistics for this study. Concurrently, the structural equation modeling method was applied to evaluate the path coefficients and mediating variables. Bootstrapping was also employed to determine the significance of the model, while the Sobel test was used to assess the significance of the mediating variables.

3. Findings and Results

Initially, the researcher conducted an analysis of the descriptive statistics pertaining to the research variables. The participants were categorized into three age groups: 20 to 25 years (69.8%), 26 to 30 years (24.9%), and 31 to 40 years (5.3%). Similarly, regarding the frequency of sexual activity per week, participants were divided into three categories: 1 to 2 times a week (41.4%), 3 to 4 times a week (50.3%), and more than 4 times a week (8.3%). In terms of educational attainment, participants were classified into four groups: Diploma, Associate Degree, Bachelor's Degree, and Master's Degree. Additionally, individuals were divided into three groups based on the duration of their marriage: 1 to 2 years (63.9%), 3 to 4 years (29.0%), and more than 4 years (7.1%). Furthermore, participants were categorized by gender into two groups: men (63.3%) and women (36.7%).

Table 1
Description of the demographic variables

Variables	Groups	Frequency	Percent	Sample Size	Median
Age	20-25	118	69.8	169	1
	26-30	42	24.9		
	31-40	9	5.3		
Sexual activity per week	1 to 2	70	41.4	169	2
	3 to 4	85	50.3		
	+4	14	8.3		
Duration of marriage	1-2	108	63.9	169	1
	3-4	49	29.0		
	+4	12	7.1		
Gender	Men	107	63.3	169	1
	Women	62	36.7		
	Diploma	34	20.1		
Education	Associate Degree	39	23.1	169	3
	Bachelor's Degree	67	39.6		
	Master's Degree	29	17.2		

Table 2
Description of the main research variables

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis	Shapiro-Wilk	
								W	p
1. Marital Satisfaction	169	169.124	15.590	149	199	0.429	-1.266	0.885	p <0.001
2. Sexual Satisfaction	169	52.775	6.631	42	64	0.037	-1.158	0.946	p <0.001
3. Self-Blame	169	9.083	2.106	5	12	-0.358	-1.085	0.916	p <0.001
4. Other-Blame	169	11.556	2.497	5	15	-0.252	-0.787	0.924	p <0.001
5. Rumination	169	12.746	4.352	5	20	-0.058	-1.258	0.932	p <0.001
6. Catastrophizing	169	12.148	2.499	5	15	-0.640	-0.327	0.887	p <0.001
7. Acceptance	169	11.923	3.356	5	16	-0.582	-1.277	0.826	p <0.001
8. Positive Refocusing	169	20.331	5.112	12	32	0.466	-0.955	0.929	p <0.001
9. Positive Reappraisal	169	11.923	2.495	5	16	-0.346	-0.560	0.931	p <0.001

Table 3 presents the correlation among the research variables as determined by Pearson's correlation coefficient. The researcher assessed the assumptions of the test. The Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to evaluate the normality of the distribution of the research variables. The results were statistically significant for the research variables ($P < 0.001$), suggesting that the research variables do not follow a normal distribution. However, given that the researcher utilized a random sampling method, this assumption has been satisfied. The sample size is adequate for conducting the structural equation modeling using the partial least squares method, with a total of 169 participants.

Table 3
Pearson's correlation coefficients

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Marital Satisfaction	Pearson's r	—							
2. Sexual Satisfaction	Pearson's r	0.627***	—						
3. Self-Blame	Pearson's r	-***	-***	—					
		0.649	0.713						

Variable		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. Other-Blame	Pearson's r	-.594 ***	-.672 ***	0.626 ***	—					
5. Rumination	Pearson's r	-.657 ***	-.668 ***	0.628 ***	0.552 ***	—				
6. Catastrophizing	Pearson's r	-.353 ***	-.550 ***	0.500 ***	0.440 ***	0.650 ***	—			
7. Acceptance	Pearson's r	-.542 ***	-.618 ***	0.645 ***	0.572 ***	0.519 ***	0.391 ***	—		
8. Positive Refocusing	Pearson's r	0.748 ***	0.684 ***	0.722 ***	0.623 ***	0.769 ***	0.541 ***	0.588 ***	—	
9. Positive Reappraisal	Pearson's r	0.536 ***	0.586 ***	0.471 ***	0.453 ***	0.646 ***	0.364 ***	0.430 ***	0.586 ***	—

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

As indicated in Table 3, marital satisfaction showed a significant positive correlation with sexual satisfaction, positive refocusing, and positive reappraisal ($P < 0.001$). Conversely, marital satisfaction had a significant negative correlation with self-blame, other-blame, rumination, catastrophizing, and acceptance ($P < 0.001$). After modeling, the researcher examined the path coefficients and significance levels among the variables (Table 4). A bootstrap value of 5,000 was used for the analysis.

Table 4

Standard research coefficients in general

Paths between variables	Path	STDEV	P-value	T-value	Result
Acceptance -> Marital Satisfaction	-0.039	0.080	0.631	0.481	rejection
Catastrophizing -> Marital Satisfaction	0.213	0.070	0.002	3.059	confirmation
Other-Blame -> Marital Satisfaction	-0.126	0.068	0.063	1.862	rejection
Positive Reappraisal -> Marital Satisfaction	0.042	0.060	0.483	0.702	rejection
Positive Refocusing -> Marital Satisfaction	0.413	0.093	0.000	4.446	confirmation
Rumination -> Marital Satisfaction	-0.218	0.096	0.023	2.280	confirmation
Self-Blame -> Marital Satisfaction	-0.135	0.084	0.110	1.599	rejection
Sexual Satisfaction -> Acceptance	-0.618	0.051	0.000	12.173	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction -> Catastrophizing	-0.550	0.055	0.000	10.050	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction -> Marital Satisfaction	0.086	0.095	0.363	0.909	rejection
Sexual Satisfaction -> Other-Blame	-0.672	0.042	0.000	16.160	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction -> Positive Reappraisal	0.586	0.043	0.000	13.548	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction -> Positive Refocusing	0.684	0.037	0.000	18.555	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction -> Rumination	-0.668	0.044	0.000	15.261	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction -> Self-Blame	-0.713	0.041	0.000	17.352	confirmation

Figure 2

Path Coefficients Among Variables and Their Significance Levels



According to the results presented in Table 4 and Figure 2, positive refocusing had a significant positive impact on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.413$, $p = 0.000$). Conversely, rumination had a significant negative impact on marital satisfaction ($\beta = -0.218$, $p = 0.023$). Additionally, sexual satisfaction significantly and positively influenced both positive reappraisal ($\beta = 0.586$, $p = 0.000$) and positive refocusing ($\beta = 0.684$, $p = 0.000$). Sexual satisfaction also had significant negative effects on acceptance ($\beta = -0.618$, $p = 0.000$), catastrophizing ($\beta = -0.550$, $p = 0.000$), other-blame ($\beta = -0.672$, $p = 0.000$), rumination ($\beta = -0.668$, $p = 0.000$), and self-blame ($\beta = -0.713$, $p = 0.000$). However, sexual satisfaction did not have a direct significant effect on marital satisfaction ($\beta = 0.086$, $p = 0.363$). The researcher further explored the indirect effects of the study variables using the bootstrap method.

Table 5
Indirect effects between research variables

Paths between variables	Path coefficient	SD	P-value	T-value	Result
Sexual Satisfaction → Positive Refocusing → Marital Satisfaction	0.282	0.067	0.000	4.189	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction → Acceptance → Marital Satisfaction	0.024	0.050	0.634	0.476	rejection
Sexual Satisfaction → Catastrophizing → Marital Satisfaction	-0.117	0.041	0.004	2.863	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction → Self-Blame → Marital Satisfaction	0.096	0.061	0.115	1.577	rejection
Sexual Satisfaction → Rumination → Marital Satisfaction	-0.146	0.063	0.021	2.308	confirmation
Sexual Satisfaction → Other-Blame → Marital Satisfaction	0.085	0.047	0.071	1.806	rejection
Sexual Satisfaction → Positive Reappraisal → Marital Satisfaction	0.025	0.036	0.488	0.694	rejection

Based on Table 5, sexual satisfaction had a significant positive indirect effect on marital satisfaction through positive refocusing ($\beta = 0.282$, $P = 0.000$). Since sexual satisfaction did not directly influence marital satisfaction, this indirect effect was fully mediated by positive refocusing, thereby enhancing marital satisfaction. Conversely, sexual satisfaction demonstrated a significant negative indirect effect on marital satisfaction through catastrophizing ($\beta = -0.117$, $P = 0.004$), which diminished marital satisfaction. Additionally, sexual satisfaction had a significant negative indirect effect on marital satisfaction via rumination ($\beta = -0.146$, $P = 0.021$). The Sobel test was employed to evaluate the significance of the mediating variables using the following formula:

$$Z \text{ value} = \frac{|a \times b|}{\sqrt{(b^2 \times S_a^2) + (a^2 \times S_b^2) + (S_a^2 \times S_b^2)}}$$

a: Path coefficient between the independent variable and the mediator.

b: Path coefficient between the mediator and the dependent variable.

Sa: Standard error for path a.

Sb: Standard error for path b.

For the Sobel test, a Z-value greater than 1.96 indicates a significant mediating effect at the 95% confidence level. The Z-value for positive refocusing as a mediator between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction was calculated to be 4.318018. The Z-value for catastrophizing as a mediator between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction was found to be -2.91107. Additionally, the Z-value for rumination as a mediator between sexual satisfaction and

marital satisfaction was determined to be 2.245849. These results confirm the significance of the mediating variables. Furthermore, the researcher assessed the coefficient of determination for the endogenous variables.

Discussion

This study aimed to examine the effect of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction, considering the mediating role of cognitive emotion regulation. The results of the present research indicate that among the components of cognitive emotion regulation, positive refocusing increased marital satisfaction, while rumination decreased marital satisfaction. Furthermore, although sexual satisfaction did not have a direct effect on marital satisfaction, it enhanced marital satisfaction through the mediation of positive refocusing and diminished it through the mediation of catastrophizing and rumination. Additionally, sexual satisfaction also led to an increase in positive reappraisal and positive refocusing, while simultaneously reducing acceptance, catastrophizing, blaming others, rumination, and self-blame.

The findings of the present study demonstrate that among the components of cognitive emotion regulation, positive refocusing enhances marital satisfaction, while rumination diminishes it. These results are consistent with previous research. For instance, Ashori and colleagues (2022) found that cognitive emotion regulation, by facilitating emotional understanding and providing opportunities for cognitive processing, improves relationships and marital satisfaction (Ashori et al., 2022). Similarly, another study reported a significant relationship between rumination and marital dissatisfaction (Kazemi & Motlagh, 2020).

To explain these findings, it is important to note that the ability of couples to regulate their emotions has behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and physiological consequences for their interactions. Negative emotional regulation can lead to adaptation problems, while positive emotional regulation plays a critical role in enhancing marital adjustment. Couples who can effectively regulate their positive cognitive emotions are better equipped to monitor their feelings when faced with emotional situations. This capability allows them to gain valuable psychological insights, trust their emotions with confidence, and manage their lives more effectively. Conversely, deficiencies in emotional regulation can result in interpersonal conflicts, as individuals with such deficiencies may avoid expressing emotions like anger and resentment. Suppressing these feelings can contribute to the development of negative emotions, ultimately increasing marital conflicts (Amini, Mardani Rad & Khosravi Babadi, 2023). Thoughts that emphasize pleasant and joyful experiences rather than negative and distressing ones, along with a positive perception of events, enable individuals to cultivate greater gratitude toward their surroundings. Conversely, dwelling on negative events and their

consequences, as well as engaging in rumination, creates distance between individuals and those around them. This often results in mutual resentment, which fosters negative emotions. Ultimately, these emotions contribute to aggression and dissatisfaction, posing a significant challenge to marital life (Sedaghatkhan, Kajbafnejad, Chinaveh & Aminimanesh, 2023).

Another finding of the study indicates that sexual satisfaction does not have a direct effect on marital satisfaction, which implicitly diverges from previous research (Arinze & Olawa, 2023; Mohammadfarahmand & Rad, 2023). Findings from one study suggested that high sexual satisfaction is significantly associated with marital satisfaction (Arinze & Olawa, 2023). Similarly, another study indicated a positive and significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction (Mohammadfarahmand & Rad, 2023). Given the lack of alignment between the results of the present study and these previous findings, it appears that factors such as sample diversity, differences in participants' living environments, cultural disparities, and varying social conditions may have influenced the outcomes of studies in this field. Although the current study, due to its novel variables and mediators, cannot be directly compared to prior research focusing on couples with marital issues, its findings regarding the influence of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction through cognitive emotion regulation components implicitly align with earlier studies (Teymouri, Mojtabaei & Rezazadeh, 2020; Azizi, 2018). Teymouri and colleagues (2020) demonstrated that emotion regulation and the reduction of anger rumination increase marital intimacy (Teymouri, Mojtabaei & Rezazadeh, 2020). Another study revealed that cognitive emotion regulation has a significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction (Azizi, 2018).

To explain this finding, it is important to recognize that sexual satisfaction and sexual health are influenced by various factors, including psychological aspects, partner dynamics, social context, environmental conditions, life stressors, and significant life events. Among these factors, emotion regulation serves as a common element through which individuals manage their emotions at different stages of emotional arousal. The ability to employ effective emotion regulation strategies can significantly impact sexual functioning by reducing negative emotions (Fischer et al., 2022). Sexual functioning and satisfaction are critical components of individuals' lives, influencing all aspects of a couple's relationship. Higher levels of sexual satisfaction contribute to enhanced marital satisfaction, as satisfaction with sexual relationships often serves as a precursor to overall marital satisfaction (Naji et al., 2024). Sexual satisfaction, perceived as an individual need encompassing both positive and negative dimensions of interpersonal relationships, plays a vital role in the psychological well-being of couples. It is a significant factor in shaping marital

satisfaction. Dissatisfaction in both areas consistently contributes to increased tendencies toward extramarital relationships and a higher rate of divorce and family dissolution (*Bafrani et al., 2023*).

Another finding of the study revealed that sexual satisfaction influences cognitive emotion regulation, which implicitly aligns with prior research (*Shabankare et al., 2021; Sævik & Konijnenberg, 2023*). One study suggested that sexual satisfaction plays a critical role in issues related to emotion regulation (*Shabankare et al., 2021*). Additionally, Sævik and colleagues (2023) highlighted in their research that emotion regulation strategies may positively affect the strength of sexual desire (*Sævik & Konijnenberg, 2023*).

In explaining this finding, it is important to note that awareness of emotions and bodily states is crucial for sexual functioning. Excessive or suppressed emotions can lead to maladjustment, aggression, anger, hatred, and anxiety, which, if left unchecked, can seriously threaten the mental and emotional well-being of individuals within a family. Consequently, couples who report experiencing such emotional states are unlikely to achieve high levels of sexual satisfaction in their marital lives, as emotional dysregulation disrupts their communication. This breakdown in communication subsequently diminishes sexual satisfaction (*Kargar, Davoodi & Mozafari, 2019*). There are various forms of positive emotion dysregulation, including impulsive behavior during positive emotional experiences, difficulty in maintaining goals while experiencing positive emotions, and a tendency to form negative judgments about positive emotions. These dysregulations can lead to negative emotional states (*Esmaili et al., 2024*). When couples encounter greater challenges in regulating negative emotions, they report higher levels of depression and anxiety, as well as lower relationship satisfaction. Given that sexual satisfaction and cognitive emotion regulation are interconnected, couples who experience more positive emotions and are skilled at managing their feelings tend to have more fulfilling sexual relationships (*Dubé, Corsini-Munt, Muise & Rosen, 2019*). The results of the present study demonstrate the significant impact of cognitive emotion regulation on marital satisfaction. Additionally, the findings reveal that sexual satisfaction influences cognitive emotion regulation, which, in turn, affects marital satisfaction through its components. These findings can be utilized in counseling centers, particularly in divorce reduction offices under the supervision of the Welfare Organization and the Psychology and Counseling Organization, as well as in pre-marital education programs and any institution dedicated to supporting couples and families. Given the importance of marital satisfaction, it is recommended that policymakers in family affairs incorporate these variables into both short- and long-term strategic programs aimed at enhancing marital stability. Furthermore, counselors and couple therapists are

encouraged to assist couples in improving their awareness of the factors that influence sexual satisfaction. This, in turn, can enhance the quality of sexual satisfaction and ultimately improve the overall quality of marital life, thereby preventing the disintegration of the family unit.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the generalizability of the findings. One limitation was the inability to adequately control for confounding variables, including environmental factors, personality and cultural differences, family dynamics, intimacy levels between couples, and the number of children. Another limitation involved cultural sensitivities, such as modesty and shame, which hindered open discussions about sexual issues. Furthermore, despite assurances given to participants that their information would remain entirely confidential, participation was voluntary, and the questionnaires were anonymous, the sensitive nature of the subject likely led to underreporting. Additionally, some couples declined to participate in the study because of the personal nature of the topic and their reluctance to discuss sexual matters. Future research is recommended to examine the relationship between additional factors and marital satisfaction, particularly those influencing marital health or predicting divorce. It is also suggested that future studies investigate other factors related to sexual satisfaction, such as religion, premarital relationships, communication skills, physical activity, intimacy, and love.

Authors' Contributions

The first author conducted the interview and collected data, while the other authors analyzed the data and wrote the article.

Declaration

We used ChatGPT to refine the academic writing in our paper.

Transparency Statement

Data are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Ethics Considerations

To ensure ethical practices, participants provided informed consent after being informed about the research goals and significance prior to the interview.

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